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ABSTRACT

The Alternate Learning Project (ALP) is a community based public high school in Providence, Rhode Island. The ALP student population participates in a program offering individualized basic skills instruction, college preparatory courses, career exploration activities, and a broad arts curriculum. Throughout, the emphasis is on continuous counseling and student responsibility. The success of ALP has been documented and its program is now available for implementation in local school districts. This booklet describes the ALP model and ALP special focus programs, and details the services available through ALP dissemination. Among the areas discussed are community resource development, family life education, competency based education, programs for students with special needs, the establishment of a child care center, curriculum development, governance and parent participation, and organization and fiscal management of alternative education. (EB)

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ALP

Alternate Learning Project

Overview of a Model High School in Providence, Rhode Island

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ALP

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"The traditional structure is not working very well. There needs to be a laboratory in every school system where new methods can be explored. If these methods are successful, then they can be used in the school department." – ALP Coordinator

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ALP-Adaption Information Summary

The Alternate Learning Project is a community-based alternative to traditional school, emphasizing basic skills, career education, and performance based graduation. The ALP model offers a complete secondary school program for local school district adaption. In addition, the following special focus programs are available:

Special Focus Programs

- Community Resource Development Program
  — for Career Education
  — for the College Experience
- Competency Based Education and Basic Skills
- ALP Child Care Center
- Family Life Peer Counselling Program
- Transitional Program for Special Needs Students
- Curriculum Development
- Organization and Fiscal Management of Alternate Education
- Governance and Parent Participation

Impact

The ALP model can help a school district to:

- reduce drop out and absentee rates
- improve student performance in basic academic skills
- develop magnet schools and programs to aid desegregation efforts
- stimulate and challenge exceptional students
- expand curricular and instructional offerings
- strengthen assessments of student skills and competencies
- increase parental support and community involvement in education

"The ALP Career Education program provides an opportunity for students to view realities of the working world by experiencing daily activities side by side with professionals in the field. It also gives professionals the opportunity to have first hand input into the educative process today."
– Work supervisor in ALP Career Education Program

Dissemination Services

ALP Dissemination provides the following services at NO COST to the local district:

- Consultation for program design and development
- Consultation for proposal and funding applications
- In-Service training for personnel carrying out adaptions of the ALP model
- Technical assistance for implementation of adaptions
- Resources and materials necessary for successful program adaption
- Consultation for evaluation and development of evaluative methodologies

Funding

A variety of funding sources are available for the development and support of educational programs based on the ALP model. These include:

- Educational Innovation and Support: Title IVC
- Desegregation Assistance: Emergency School Aid Act
- ESEA Title I
- Special Projects Act:
  - Career Education
  - Arts Education
- Vocational Education: Special Programs for the Disadvantaged
  - Cooperative Education
  - Work Study
  - Innovation (exemplary projects)
  - Curriculum Development
- Right to Read: Reading Academies
- Law Enforcement Assistance Act
- other local, state, and Federal funding sources

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Introduction

Background

The Alternate Learning Project is a comprehensive public high school located in Providence, Rhode Island. ALP is a community-based school, whose curriculum utilizes the rich and varied learning resources of Greater Providence. The diverse ALP student population participates in a program offering individualized basic skills instruction, college preparatory courses, career exploration activities, and a broad arts curriculum. Throughout, the emphasis is on continuous counselling and student responsibility.

Plans for the school were initiated by a group of parents, students, and school officials. They wanted to create a school that would be an alternative for high school students in Providence, and more, a school that would confront the pressing educational problems of our day. Among the major ideas ALP is designed to address are:

- *Choice* — students and parents should have a choice about the kind of educational program in which to participate.
- *Community Resources* — local communities offer a wealth of learning opportunities for students
- *Basic Skills* — students MUST be prepared in basic academic skills before graduation from high school
- *Parent Participation* — Parents have a right to participate in school related decisions affecting their children.
- *Dropout Rates* — drop out rates and absenteeism can be reduced by involving students in an educational program directly related to their interests, needs, and concerns.

"Traditional high schools are not for all young people, just as suburbs are not for all families. Public School systems have an obligation to seek ways of meeting the desires and needs of all the young people in the community." – Editorial, Providence Journal Newspaper

"I love ALP. My counselor really helped me choose the right courses for me so I could do what I want to do – DANCE! I now have all my credits for graduation and I can begin at the American Ballet Theatre in New York while I'm only 16!" – ALP Student

"We are fortunate in Providence to have the Alternate Learning Project." – Providence School Department Administrator

In 1971, ALP put these ideas into operation, developing a secondary school to service a representative sample of Providence's student population. The success of ALP has been recognized and validated by a team of experts from the U.S. Office of Education. Additional third party evaluations, as well as statistics on ALP graduates, document ALP's success.

The ALP model, tested and proven under rigorous scrutiny, is now available for adaption in local school districts. The program is designed to be *flexible, responsive* to local needs, and *adaptable* to local conditions.

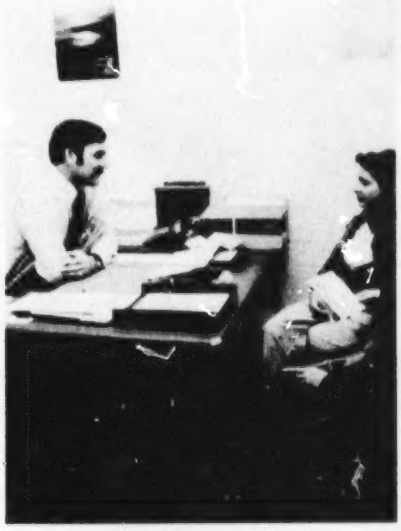
The purpose of this overview is to introduce you to the ALP model, to inform you of the "ALP Special Focus Programs" for adaption, and to detail the services available through ALP Dissemination.

Features of the ALP Model

1. **COST**
   ALP costs *less*. The ALP per pupil expenditure ($1,100) has proven to be $700 less, on average, than the $1,800 per-pupil expenditure in Providence.

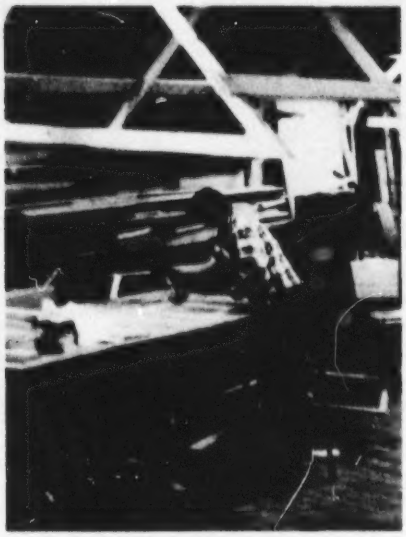
2. **ENROLLMENT**
   Students enroll by *choice*. Applications are selected by lottery, using such factors as race, family income, sex, and grade level to achieve a population reflective of the city and school system profile.

3. **BASIC SKILLS**
   The ALP basic skills component has three elements:
   A. *Diagnostic Testing* — Assessment of needs is the first stage of the ALP Basic Skills program. All entering students take diagnostic tests in English and Math, with results used to guide counselling and course placements.
   B. *Individualized Instruction* — In areas where deficiencies are identified, basic skills are strengthened through individualized instruction. Students work intensively, at their own pace, under close supervision of their teachers.
   C. *Competency Based Graduation* — To become eligible for graduation, students are required to achieve a minimum level of proficiency in English, Math, and Science. ALP requires students to demonstrate mastery of basic skills, using standardized and ALP developed test instruments.



4. **COUNSELLING**
   Students receive intensive academic and personal counselling for the planning, evaluation, and support of learning activities.

5. **COURSES**
   A full range of traditional academic courses is provided, along with instruction in the arts, career placements, special projects, and tutorials. Working with their counsellor, each student prepares an individual schedule by selecting classes and activities from the course catalogue. Course selection is guided by the results of diagnostic testing, as well as by the student's current interests and future goals.



6. **COMMUNITY RESOURCES**
   A. *Career Education* — Students explore career possibilities and obtain work experience through community field placements in the business, industrial, and public service sectors. Working together with adult professionals at the employer site, students gain increased awareness of career opportunities, while improving career decision making skills and attitudes toward learning.
   B. *The College Experience* — Under an agreement between Rhode Island College and the Providence School Department, qualified ALP students are able to attend classes at Rhode Island College. These advanced students experience the demands and the challenges of a college education, earning high school credit, and in many cases, college credit for their work.
   C. *Special Projects* — Together with the Providence Community Action Program, ALP has developed two special projects oriented toward the needs of young adults. These are:
      1. The ALP Child Care Center — providing day care services and parenting classes for teenage mothers studying toward their high school diploma.
      2. The Family Life Peer Counselling Service — A select group of ALP students is trained as peer counsellors. They work individually and with groups of young adults to address issues of family and interpersonal relationships.
   D. *Independent Study* — Any student with a particular interest may work independently with a resource person from the community. This may mean a carpentry apprenticeship for one student, or a pottery class for another. It includes weaving with a professional weaver, studying with a photographer, or learning karate or jazz dancing in a commercial studio.

7. **GOVERANCE**
   Governance and decision making at ALP is a task shared by students, parents, and staff. Each group contributes to the creation of rules and regulations, as well as to the setting of overall policy and direction for the school.

How ALP Works

The People

Students enroll in ALP by choice and the school has continually had a waiting list of over 300. The student body of 150 is drawn from all over the city. Prior academic performance is not a factor in determining admission. The major common denominator among students is a dissatisfaction with traditional schooling.

The core staff at ALP numbers ten: seven teacher-counsellors, a director, an administrative assistant, and a community liaison. This is supplemented by professional artist (including a potter, photographer, painter, musician, dancer, gymnast and a karate instructor), college interns, and parent and community volunteers teaching on a part-time basis.

The Program

At ALP we work to change the student's concern from "Do I have enough credits to graduate?" to: "Do I have the skills I need to move ahead?" In order to get a diploma from ALP, a student must demonstrate proficiency in the areas of English, Math, and General Science, in addition to completing a minimum number of U.S. History and elective courses.

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"This is the starting point . . . a people oriented place." – ALP Student

Students make up their own program from a wide range of classes, career placements, projects, and tutorials. The school operates on a quarter system, and at the beginning of each quarter a catalogue of offerings is complied. Included are many traditional academic courses such as Algebra II, Critical Writing, French I; instruction in the arts including photography, life drawing, pottery, music theory, and dance; as well as an array of more unusual offerings such as The Gothic Novel, Creative Black Expression, You and the Law, Canoeing, Hiking and General Exploration.

The curriculum changes constantly. Subject areas not offered at the school, such as physics, typing, and computer programming can be pursued through course offerings at nearby colleges, the city's other high schools, and community education centers.

Helping the student select a program is that member of the core teaching staff the student has chosen as a counsellor. Students meet with their counsellor during regularly scheduled evaluation periods. At these quarterly sessions, the student reviews progress, identifies troublesome areas, discusses plans and goals, and makes out a schedule for the next quarter.

Final evaluations of student course work are prepared in written form by all teachers. These evaluations go into the student's permanent file and form the basis for college and job recommendations. While grades are often used within classes, the final transcript indicates either credit, no credit, or credit with distinction for the course.

Students at ALP receive a regular high school diploma. Colleges have few problems with our gradelessness; approximately 65% of our graduates go on to four-year colleges every year. Both these students and those who have opted for job training or employment after graduation report that attendance at ALP has helped them in their work, in their academic preparation, and in their interpersonal and adjustment skills.

"ALP opened up new possibilities to me. All learning doesn't take place in school. You can pursue anything you wish as long as you have direction. I worked in the Head Start program when I was at ALP. Then I continued to work with children in a kibbutz in Israel." – ALP graduate who is now a college student at University Without Walls.

ALP Special Focus Programs for Adaption

The creation of relevant and viable learning opportunities for high school students in a closely structured yet open environment has been the major thrust of the Alternate Learning Project. Since 1971, ALP has responded to student and school needs through the development of specialized programs and activities. These "ALP Special Focus Programs for Adaption" are now available to adaptors interested in one or more components of the ALP model. The nine ALP Special Focus Programs for adaption are described below:

Community Resource Development for Career Education

Career Education forms a cornerstone of the total program available to ALP students. Career education at ALP combines work experience in a community field placement with related academic course work and individualized study. The focus of ALP career education is to:

a) expand student awareness of career opportunities
b) improve student career decision making skills
c) develop student skills and competencies related to job acquisition and retention
d) improve student self image and attitude toward learning.

Students participating in the ALP career education program work alongside adults in various business, industrial and community settings. Adult supervisors share with students their daily activities, providing important exposure to and experience in the world of work. Furthermore the supervisor exerts significant influence on a student's incentive to learn, serving as a positive adult role model.

Field work experiences are integrated with an instructional program having a three prong emphasis on basic academic skills:

a) individualized instruction — to address diagnosed English and Math needs
b) group courses and activities — to focus on specific content areas while developing social and interpersonal skills
c) independent projects — to supplement academic work and enrich the field site experience.

Community Resource Development for the College Experience

An agreement between the Providence School Department and Rhode Island College has created the *CLEAR* Program, the College/Local Educational Agency Relationship. Advanced students at ALP are able to enroll in College courses, earning high school credit while gaining experience with the demands of a college education. College level credit may be earned in cases where the student has registered as a visiting student. The CLEAR program offers tutorial services, internship opportunities, staff training and development activities, and a means by which the advanced high school student can pursue a rewarding and meaningful academic program.

Competency Based Education and Basic Skills

An assessment and instructional program geared toward improving student performance in basic skills. Competency Based Education at ALP involves diagnostic testing, counselling and placement, individualized course work, proficiency examinations, and evaluations of student performance in real life situations. Central to the operation of Competency Based Education at ALP is a focus on the curriculum as well as on the student. Information gained from assessment instruments is used to evaluate the effectiveness of current instructional offerings.

School districts choosing to adapt the ALP Competency Based Education Program will be provided with:

a) Diagnostic tests currently in use
b) Proficiency tests currently in use
c) A Life Skills Competency Assessment format
d) An implementation design to coordinate the application of competency measures for:
   1) individual student assessment
   2) overall curricular planning

Family Life Peer Counselling Program

The ALP Family Life and Peer Counselling Program provides a meaningful and relevant approach to the study of family life. ALP students are trained as peer-counsellors by The Providence Community Action Program's Family Planning Program. Under the supervision of a professional counsellor, ALP peer-counsellors offer film presentations, seminars, rap groups, and special topic workshops to groups of adolescents throughout Rhode Island. The goal is to deliver accurate information in all areas of family life, including human relationships, values, personal identity, sexuality, communication, and decision making.

"I've seen how some of the patients enjoy having Bernard help them in their excercises. He shows a lot of interest and concern." – R.I. Hospital Employee

ALP Child Care Center

The ALP has established an in-school child care center operating at *NO COST* to the school or school district. Funding for the center has been arranged jointly between the Providence Community Action Program (Pro CAP), and the R.I. Department of Welfare. Students eligible for child care services under welfare department guidelines are able to participate, and all payments are handled by the Pro CAP agency.

The purpose of the ALP child care program is to assist school age mothers in their efforts to remain in or return to high school after having children by providing quality child care services within the school. Goals of the ALP Child Care program are:

a) To enable school age mothers to participate in the academic program offered at the ALP, as well as to receive training in child development and parenting.
b) To provide the mothers with a supportive group experience and counselling pertaining to individual problems.
c) To provide a training program at the child care center for high school students in preparation for future parenthood and child care careers.
d) To increase public awareness and understanding of school age mothers and their needs.

Transitional Program for Special Needs Students

An ancillary program available through ALP, the focus of the Transitional Program is to provide diverse instructional and support services to students who have dropped out of traditional high school. The goals of the transitional program are to:

a) motivate the student to return to the regular high school for completion of diploma requirements.
b) provide entry for the student into an equivalency program.
c) provide employment preparation for students through job placements, and individualized learning programs to support job activity.

"Going to ALP I had a lot more independence. This helped me gain a sense of responsibility that really paid off when I was on my own at college." – ALP Alumni

"I love the Day Care program. My daughter is here with me and I can see what goes on with her. I don't have to bring her to my classes. I'm into painting, working on my competencies, and I hope to graduate and get a scholarship to art school." – ALP student

Curriculum Development

At ALP, the curriculum is the cornerstone of student and staff activity. Expansion, and improvement of the ALP curriculum has continued in each year of the school's growth. The methodologies used to develop the ALP curriculum, as well as the resources gathered for instruction, are available to those interested in curriculum development.

Organization and Fiscal Management of Alternative Education

ALP operates on a budget approximately $700 less, per pupil, than the city average of $1,800. To achieve these savings, fiscal and management strategies have been devised which are capable of supporting the growth of an alternative organizational structure for the delivery of secondary educational services. The long term success of an innovative program is most often determined by its cost effectiveness, and ALP fiscal strategies have kept operating costs at a minimum while delivering high quality educational services.

Governance and Parent Participation

The ALP model has succeeded in part, due to the operation of a governing system involving staff, parents, and students in major policy decisions. Students have an increased respect for decisions they participate in and parents become actively involved in the school as contributing members. The growth, shape and direction of the school has been influenced considerably by the input of these three parties.

Governance procedures at ALP have been developed to give each person a voice in decision making and at the same time govern the school efficiently and effectively. Government of the school consists of committees making recommendations to the Coordinator. Their actions may be overturned by a meeting of the school community. Membership on these committees is voluntary, but must include parents, students, and staff. Committee responsibilities include curriculum, budget, staff review, graduation review, discipline, and communication and coordination.

"One of the most valuable of our educational programs in Providence." – Providence School Department Administrator

The ALP Model: Information for Adaptors

In recognition of its validity as an innovative model, the Alternate Learning Project has received a U.S. Office of Education grant providing for dissemination of information about the school and development of a training format for those wishing to adapt the ALP program in their community.

ALP is ready to work with local districts that wish to serve as adaption sites for the ALP model. Adaption of ALP can help a school district to:

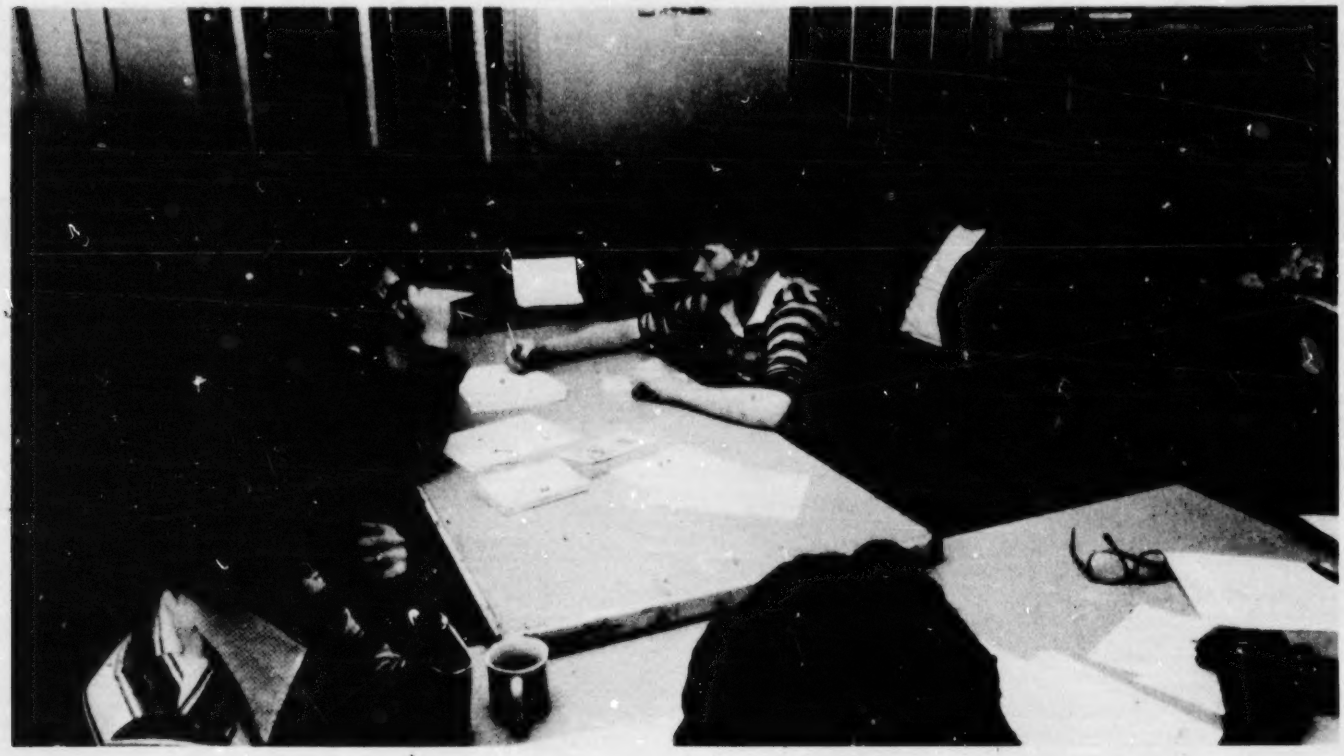
- reduce drop out and absentee rates
- improve student performance in basic academic skills
- develop magnet schools and programs to aid desegregation efforts
- stimulate and challenge exceptional students
- expand curricular and instructional offerings
- strengthen assessments of student skills and competencies
- increase parental support and community involvement in education

ALP has worked with over 20 school districts across the U.S. to develop new programs and improve already existing ones. The ALP model has been successfully adapted in rural, surburban, and urban districts; with alternate schools housed in separate facilities, and with schools located within schools. Adaptions of ALP have ranged from programs for twenty students to schools for over one hundred.

The range and scope of an ALP adaption is variable, depending on the needs of the local school and local school district. ALP Dissemination is designed to be *flexible,* so as to provide relevant and useful assistance. We do not dictate the kind of program a school should have; rather, we work with adapting school personnel to design a program that is best suited to their needs.

"I enjoy going there. The school shows you you have to have responsibility. . . . It's like being out in life." – ALP Student

"ALP is exciting. It's growing. For example, the College Local Educational Agency Relationship (CLEAR) provides an opportunity to gain admission of accelerated students into college as early as the sophomore year. The program with Rhode Island College and the Alternate Learning Project is unique and flexible. There are only a couple of schools doing this in the country." – ALP Coordinator



Dissemination Services

Services available FREE OF CHARGE, to local districts through ALP Dissemination are:

- Consultation for program design and development
- Consultation for proposal and funding applications
- In-Service training for personnel carrying out adaptions of the ALP model
- Technical assistance for implementation of adaptions
- Resources and materials necessary for successful program adaption
- Consultation for evaluation and development of evaluative methodologies

During the first year of ALP, a gentleman delivering supplies to the school wondered whether he had the right place and asked "is this the Ultimate Learning Project?" Though we are far from having magical solutions to the education of high school students, we do feel we have developed sound ideas and approaches of value to others.

For more information please write or call:

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